

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

IMPACT OF STUDENT ASSESSMENT ON SPECIAL EDUCATION DUE PROCESS
HEARING OUTCOMES

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The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) is the law governing special education practices in schools throughout the United States. This law includes access to due process hearings to settle disputes that arise when parents and school districts disagree. Student assessment, the development of the individualized educational program, and educational placement decisions are 3 areas within IDEA that become points of contention for districts and families involved in the special education process. The relationship between student assessment and educational placement becomes critical when districts are brought to due process hearings.

The case studies of the sixty-six due process hearings held in Maine from 1998-2002 were analyzed. The Fisher's Exact Test was used to establish or refute a relationship between student assessment and the correctness of placement decisions. Qualitative analysis was applied to each case study as a means through which to analyze the relationship between student assessment and placement decisions.

The null hypothesis for this research was that there is no relationship between student assessment and the likelihood of school districts prevailing in due process hearings specific to placement decisions. This hypothesis was rejected by applying Fisher's Exact Test. A statistically significant relationship between student assessment and placement decisions was established. Qualitative analysis conducted supported this relationship by correlating the due process hearing officers' findings of facts and conclusions of law with the assessment data in evidence at the hearing. School districts prevailed at due process hearings when assessment data provided the structure through which educational placement decisions were made.